

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET/NO DIS/SENSITIVE~~

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION-

DATE: January 27, 1970

PLACE: The Oval Office

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Prime Minister Wilson
Sir Burke Trent
Henry A. Kissinger

Wilson initiated the conversation. He began with a discussion of the Nigerian problem making an all-out defense of the Lagos Government. He said that the Nigerians don't want to be pushed around. The Russians have taken an anti-tribal line, and have therefore scored many points in Nigeria. Military discipline is being restored so that there was no danger of unusual massacres in the eastern province. The Western report indicated that most of the starvation in the enclave antedated the occupation by the Nigerians. It proves that starvation was even then endemic. Of course, he concluded, the press takes dirty and slushy pictures, but if one takes a panoramic view, one recognizes that things are as well as they could be, and that many of the reports of starvation are self-serving.

The President asked whether more supplies could be sent in. Mr. Kissinger observed that most of the difficulty was not in getting food into Nigeria, but in getting it from the entrance port to the Eastern Region. Mr. Wilson said that the important thing was to get tents for the Federal troops in the Eastern Region so they would not have to live off the population. The President said it was essential that we keep our humanitarian concern front and center in order not to be vulnerable to public opinion. The Prime Minister replied, "Let's make sure that we don't push Lagos into the arms of the Soviets; we have to keep close together. Another week or ten days is likely to get us out of the woods."

The President repeated that we should defuse the issue by making clear that our concern is primarily humanitarian. We and the British have to work together for common humanitarian concerns. We have to try to make clear that we are on top of the situation and that we are doing what we can.

~~SECRET/NO DIS/SENSITIVE~~

~~SECRET/NOBIS/SENSITIVE~~

-2-

Wilson then challenged the figure that 2,000 tons a week had gone into Biafra in the last weeks. He said that only 1,000 tons went in and that a maximum of 6,000 tons were needed now. We agreed that we would try to achieve a joint estimate of the situation.

[Omitted here is discussion of unrelated issues]

~~SECRET/NOBIS/SENSITIVE~~

~~SECRET/NO DIS/SENSITIVE~~

- 5 -

January 28 Meeting Between the President, Prime Minister Wilson,
Sir Burke Trent and Mr. Henry Kissinger in the Oval Office.

The President began the conversation with a rather strong statement on Nigeria. He said he is not concerned with who caused the suffering; I don't want to hear "who killed John?" We don't blame the Federals. The fact is that the suffering exists. Quakers and Jewish people in particular are concerned, and the President himself has a Quaker background. Because people are concerned, everyone should help now. We should all try to get Gowon's cooperation to respond to Nigerian need. We should at least agree on a common factual basis.

Wilson said we should remember Gone with the Wind's 700 pages on the situation after the Civil War and that there was always a lot of suffering in such cases. The President said yes, and we don't want a nationalist-socialist combination in Nigeria, but still we have to do what we can.

[Omitted here is discussion of unrelated issues]

~~SECRET/NO DIS/SENSITIVE~~